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By FRA ELBERTUS

From "The Philistine"
for January 1901

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WHY HE CUT THE WOMEN OUT

By FRA ELBERTUS

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WHY HE CUT THE WOMEN OUT

R. PIRIE MACDONALD, formerly of Albany, but now of New York City, is a photographer. He calls himself a Photographic Artist—and he is. He has more medals, and gets higher prices than any photographer in America. His prices are as high as a church steeple. Pirie is the only man I ever knew, or heard of, who made a fortune taking photographs. He has his limit in every savings bank in Albany, owns a block of flats, and sports an automobile in the park with a bull-dog sitting beside him.

Pirie of the Medals does not take everybody's picture--he picks his customers. As you enter his place he sizes you up through a peep-hole from behind the arras, and if your countenance lacks a trace of the classic, Pirie signals his assistant, & you are informed that Mr. MacDonald is in Europe and will not return for a year and a half.

Mr. MacDonald's specialty until recently has been Society Belles--tall, lissome

beauties, proud and haughty, with a wondrous length of limb; these are the kind he liked best. And so famous is MacDonald that sitters have come to him from Rochester, Potsdam, Chambersburg, Rahway and all the country 'round and gladly paid the price of one hundred simoleons for one portrait, done with that wonderful Rembrandtesque effect, and signed by the artist. Often Pirie would send the fair one home to change her dress, but if her hair needed re-arranging he always attended to that himself. Pirie's skill lay in posing his sitter so to get the best result. Usually he would sit down with his subject & talk to her about this or that, and tell her stories, pathetic or comic, and all the time he would be watching her countenance and debating in his mind whether he would pose her as a Madonna, Sappho, Judith, Marguerite or Queen Louise. The Judith-Holofernes pose was his best, but it was often difficult to bring about the feeling that gave attitude. Women want to look pretty, and that was n't what Pirie cared for: he desired chicity-chic, go, biff and eclat. To this end he often had to resort to a scheme to bring the sitter out of her affected self-consciousness. "Look into my eyes," he

would sometimes command; and when all else failed, Pirie would assume wrath, and declare "Here you--why in tarnation can't you do as I want you to!" and he would clap one hand on the beauty's head and the other under her chin and give her a few sharp turns to win'ard, and end by administering a sharp slap athwart her glutæus maximus, to straighten her spine. By this time the woman would be simply furious, and speechless with rage. Then she would sit bolt upright, ready to explode, but she was not given time to go off, for Pirie would step back three steps and shout exultantly, "Splendid! Hold that--Hold that!" and then he would rush forward, kiss her on the cheek, and back again he would spring crying, "Hold that! Hold that!" and the bulb was pressed.

And when all was over the artist was so penitent, so humble and beseeching in his manner, so profuse in his explanations that it was all in the interests of Art, that all was forgiven, for base indeed is that woman who is not willing to sacrifice her feelings on the altar of Divine Art. And thus did Pirie get the most wonderful "Salome," which was the wonder of the Paris Exposition, and was declared by

the judges to be the strongest and most effective study in photography ever exhibited. In every line it showed such a fine feminine rage--such pride & smothered passion--that people looked at it in amazement. No one knew that Pirie had tumbled the woman's hair in one fell grab, and had thus aroused her wrath, and then offered her insult by kissing her and so brought that fine look of burning shame and mingled rage to her proud face.

It 's a great picture and it will pay you to stop off at Albany the next time you are down that way and go to the State House and see it.

But the Ideal continually recedes, and Pirie having the true instinct of an artist was fired with an ambition to do still better. The opportunity came, & Pirie, looking out through the peep-hole, beheld a woman, say of twenty-eight, five feet eleven, weight one hundred and sixty. Her beautiful and abundant hair was bleached, and she had the proud and self-reliant look of one who had conquests that lay behind, and others, greater still, within her grasp. Her neat-fitting jacket and tailor-made gown showed off her fine form to advantage. The strong features were pure Greek.

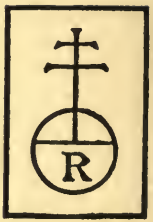
Pirie almost screamed with delight, and hastily he ordered his assistant to begone and leave the customer to him. "Oh! now we shall have a real Herodias--that Paris picture will be only a tintype to this. My! what a splendid tiger she is!"

. . . . . .

That is really all we know about the matter. The attendant improved the opportunity to go out on an errand, and when the neighbors in the law office across the hall heard the commotion and rushed out they caught the swish of skirts and got a glimpse of a tailor-made gown going down the stairway. Pirie was found, panting and helpless, in a corner of the studio, with the black cloth viciously knotted around his neck, and the tripod, camera and sitter's throne on top of him. There was a bad scalp wound extending from one ear to the crown of his head, and it looked as though he had been given a walk to first with the lens.

Pirie never made any statement about the matter, but his card now reads:

PIRIE MACDONALD
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTIST
Portraits of Men Only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